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Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/182, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. It is also submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 61/34.

The present report describes the humanitarian developments of the past year, provides an overview of key initiatives to improve the humanitarian system and analyses two thematic issues of concern: the use of military assets in natural disaster relief and needs-based humanitarian financing, including the Central Emergency Response Fund. The report ends with a series of recommendations for further strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance of the United Nations based on the conclusions contained in the report.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report responds to the requests contained in General Assembly resolution 61/134 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/81.

II. Humanitarian developments

A. The year in review

2. The reporting period was marked by positive developments in several long-standing emergencies, offering significant opportunities for the United Nations and its partners to strengthen humanitarian assistance and allow peaceful solutions to take hold. However, the same period saw the continuation and, in some cases, the further aggravation of existing emergencies and an increase in the incidence and severity of disasters caused by natural hazards. These events confirm the need to remain focused on strengthening the capacity of humanitarian actors to address the effects of emergencies on the lives and livelihoods of millions of people.

3. Successful elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2006 helped diminish the violence that has directly and indirectly claimed some 4 million lives since 1998. While fighting continues to dominate some eastern areas, relative peace elsewhere has allowed tens of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons to return home. The fragile yet promising peace talks between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda present the best opportunity in 20 years for lasting peace and stability in northern Uganda and southern Sudan. In Nepal, the 2006 truce between the Government and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist ended a decade of armed conflict, encouraging hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people to return to their homes. Though concerns remain about the implementation of the truce at the local level, it has created the conditions for the stabilization of populations beleaguered by cycles of insurgency.

4. Despite this progress, many conflicts continue to rage unabated with predictable consequences for civilians: lawlessness, armed violence, displacement and loss of livelihoods essential for survival. In Darfur, attacks against civilians, including rape and other forms of gender-based violence, have driven 250,000 people from their homes during the last six months alone and forced thousands more across borders into the Central African Republic and Chad. In Somalia, the upsurge in fighting between militias and Government forces backed by Ethiopian troops has forced more than 400,000 people to flee Mogadishu without their possessions and with little access to food, clean water or shelter. Renewed fighting in Sri Lanka displaced more than 300,000 civilians, adding to the estimated 400,000 previously displaced by the tsunami and internal conflict.

5. Conflicts also continue to affect populations throughout the Middle East. In Iraq, the civilian death toll now averages more than 100 per day. An estimated 8 million civilians are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including 2 million internally displaced, some 800,000 of whom have been displaced since February 2006, and 2 million who have fled to the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 972 residents were killed as a result of the continuing conflict; of these, 274 were victims of internal fighting. In the same period, 16 Israelis were killed and 15 injured by home-made rockets fired from the

Gaza Strip. The 34 days of military strikes in Lebanon and Israel during the summer of 2006 resulted in more than 1,000 Lebanese civilian deaths and 43 Israeli civilian deaths, the displacement of more than a million people in Lebanon and 300,000 in Israel and the registration of some 900 cluster munitions sites across south Lebanon.

6. Worldwide, some 4 million people were forced to flee their homes in 2006, more than twice as many as in 2005, primarily in Sudan, Colombia, Somalia and Iraq. The number of refugees under the UNHCR mandate increased from 8.6 million to 9.9 million.[1]

7. Meanwhile, the incidence and severity of disasters associated with natural hazards continue to rise at a steady rate, causing alarming human impact. In 2006, 426 disasters affected 143 million people, resulting in $34.6 billion in economic damages. This is an increase over the 400 disasters recorded in 2005 and well above the five-year average of 386. As in previous years, the deadliest disasters involved geological hazards. The earthquake that struck the Indonesian island of Java in May 2006 killed more than 5,700 people and left 1.5 million homeless — three times those who lost their homes in Aceh in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004. The earthquake that struck the Solomon Islands in 2007 resulted in a tsunami that washed away transportation, communications and sanitation systems, hospitals and schools.

8. Hydro-meteorological hazards inflicted more than $2.1 billion in economic losses. Typhoons and floods in South-East Asia affected close to 8 million people in the Philippines. Excessive rains and severe flooding in the Horn of Africa displaced more than 650,000 people. Heavy rains coupled with an unprecedented number of cyclones and tropical storms caused extensive flooding across southern Africa, affecting more than 1 million people. Inadequate and uneven rainfall in Afghanistan has prolonged a drought that resulted in a lost harvest. Current food supplies are now estimated to be 20 per cent below annual needs.

B. System-wide response

9. In responding to complex emergencies, humanitarian actors, the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the International Organization of Migration and non-governmental organizations, in partnership with national and local authorities and civil society groups, have been able to take advantage of the positive developments discussed above and step up relief efforts to areas where access was previously restricted due to violence. Building on such momentum requires collective international efforts to sustain relief and recovery activities and support to national authorities. At the same time, dialogue and engagement must be maintained with all parties involved.

10. However, aid workers continue to face problems reaching vulnerable populations and are increasingly becoming the targets of deliberate attacks. In 2006, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security reported 163 attacks against humanitarian workers in 38 countries, including six deaths. These attacks, which included intimidation, harassment, looting, hijacking and threats, were highest in Sudan (Darfur), Chad and Afghanistan, forcing many organizations to cease

[1] These figures are exclusive of Palestinian refugees in the UNRWA area of operation.

operations at a time when humanitarian needs were rising fast.[2] Though the United Nations is working to improve the security environment for all organizations involved in humanitarian response, through efforts such as the "Saving lives together" initiative, persistent attacks and insecurity often oblige them to withdraw, thereby jeopardizing essential lifelines to populations whose survival is at risk.

11. Despite such dangerous operating environments, United Nations humanitarian staff and their partners were able to provide urgently needed assistance. For example, in Darfur, humanitarian organizations have assisted more than 3 million civilians, providing food, clean water, shelter and medical care, though their need for protection from violence remains acute. In Somalia, from March to May 2007, humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations, with local partners, were able to deliver food, plastic sheets, blankets, chlorine kits and medical supplies to approximately 120,000 of the displaced in limited areas.

12. As for disasters associated with natural hazards, humanitarian needs were met principally by the affected governments and communities themselves, with the support of the United Nations and its partners. Seven United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams were deployed to assess needs, coordinate the overall response and mitigate acute environmental impacts arising from the disasters, while United Nations civil-military coordination officers were deployed to coordinate with foreign and national military and civil defence assets in support of humanitarian operations. Improving disaster response time and strengthening risk reduction and preparedness continue to be primary challenges.

C. Current challenges

13. This account suggests that humanitarian concerns will endure, demands on humanitarian actors and operations are likely to grow and the principles that underpin humanitarian activities will continue to be challenged and tested. Adequately addressing such demands requires joint efforts to promote respect for humanitarian principles, address operational challenges and invest in measures that ensure effective responses to humanitarian emergencies even before they occur.

Humanitarian access

14. The ability of humanitarian actors to reach populations in need and the related ability of such populations to receive humanitarian assistance is the prerequisite for all humanitarian operations as set forth under international humanitarian law. This fundamental principle was reiterated by Member States in General Assembly resolution 46/182, which calls upon States whose populations are in need of humanitarian assistance to facilitate the work of humanitarian actors in implementing humanitarian assistance, in particular as regards supplying food, medicines, shelter and health care, for which access to victims is essential. Though such a provision has been reiterated in subsequent intergovernmental resolutions, more effort is required to ensure that such access is granted, maintained and sustained on the ground.

[2] Deaths recorded here are only those due to malicious acts. These statistics include only those reported to the United Nations Department of Safety and Security and therefore capture only incidents involving United Nations staff.

15. In the Sudan, close to two thirds of the population in the province of Darfur are currently off limits to United Nations assistance. Important life-saving achievements made since 2004, such as increased vaccination and reduced malnutrition and mortality levels, are at risk due to regular militia attacks and administrative restrictions. In Somalia, escalating violence in Mogadishu has prevented humanitarian assistance from reaching four out of five needy people in the capital. In Iraq, attacks against humanitarian organizations have forced major restrictions on the number and movements of aid personnel throughout the country. In Afghanistan, inability to reach large parts of the south has prevented aid agencies from obtaining a clear, objective picture of humanitarian needs. In the occupied Palestinian territory, internal political divisions, Israeli economic and military pressure and an increasing number of obstacles to movement have resulted in an aggravated humanitarian situation, including a 13 per cent rise in food insecurity. The reasons for limited access are many; they include fighting, bombing, banditry, and other criminal activity, the proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons, excessive bureaucratic requirements and inadequate respect for humanitarian principles. Whatever the reasons, restricted access limits the ability of humanitarian organizations to do their work effectively.

16. In some cases, Governments have taken urgently needed steps towards facilitating safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian aid workers to vulnerable populations. In March, a joint communiqué was signed by the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations, to ease administrative burdens. In Somalia, the transitional government formed an inter-ministerial committee to facilitate humanitarian response and reopened civilian airstrips for the delivery of relief supplies. In Uganda, the Government has worked in close partnership with the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and donors to improve humanitarian access in the North. These are critical but initial steps that must be closely monitored to ensure their full, sustained and speedy implementation. Such steps should also be replicated by other Governments in areas where access is still insufficient. The United Nations stands ready to assist Governments in this regard.

17. Governments should also take all necessary steps to protect humanitarian personnel working within their borders, including by publicly acknowledging their impartiality and positive services to vulnerable groups and by prosecuting the perpetrators of criminal acts against them. The United Nations and its humanitarian partners must do their part to observe the culture, traditions and practices of the countries in which they are operating. Improving humanitarian access requires operational efforts by Governments and the United Nations to create and maintain the operational space needed by humanitarian actors to provide assistance in line with their mandates and based on respect for the globally recognized principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Regional aspects of humanitarian emergencies

18. The spread of humanitarian emergencies across international borders is a common phenomenon, prompting humanitarian consequences on a regional scale. The 20-year conflict between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army has led to displacement, conflict and loss of infrastructure and livelihoods throughout northern Uganda, southern Sudan and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Refugees escaping attacks in Darfur have now been joined by 140,000 displaced persons in Chad and 210,000 in the Central African Republic who are

fleeing raids conducted across the borders into their homelands. The dramatic escalation of sectarian violence in Iraq has driven 2 million Iraqis into neighbouring States, increasing insecurity in border areas and putting pressure on host communities in Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic.[3]

19. Natural disasters often affect multiple countries simultaneously. The heavy rains and storms in southern Africa in 2006/2007 contributed to heavy flooding, the spread of water-borne disease and loss of crops in Angola, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia simultaneously. Cycles of flooding and droughts in the Horn of Africa and in southern Africa have an impact on displacement, migration and food security across countries.

20. These are telling examples of how the spillover effects of individual conflicts and disasters deepen humanitarian problems and further complicate the delivery of assistance. Though regional in nature, the underlying causes of vulnerability to these emergencies may vary significantly between and within countries, requiring solutions that take both national and regional approaches into account. Regional organizations have an important role to play and should be engaged and supported to boost national responses when regional concerns are at stake.

Preparedness and risk reduction

21. The rising impact of disasters is due to a real increase in natural events and also to increased population exposure and vulnerability to the destructive effects of disasters. Climate change, rapid and unplanned urbanization, rising population density, displacement and HIV prevalence all contribute to this trend. Addressing recurrent human and material loss, environmental and social degradation and increased vulnerability requires that the international community work towards a disaster management approach that tackles the interconnectedness of threats and vulnerabilities.

22. Addressing the human consequences of disasters requires solutions that aim to contain natural hazards, reduce exposure to them and make preparedness and early warning priorities within national, international and regional disaster management schemes. Priority five of the Hyogo Framework for Action, Strengthening disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels, recognizes this and urges the incorporation of risk reduction strategies into preparedness plans. Several initiatives are under way by United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners to support national authorities in these efforts, such as community-based training, the provision of basic first aid equipment and the pre-positioning of relief items. Continued investment by Governments in the development and support of disaster preparedness and contingency plans, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable areas and groups, regular disaster preparedness exercises and access to essential food and non-food relief supplies, as appropriate to local needs, will do much to limit the human and material toll of future hazard events.

[3] Figures provided by the Internal displacement monitoring centre of the Norwegian refugee council; figures on Iraqis of concern to UNHCR in neighbouring States provided by UNHCR.

III. Enhancing the effectiveness of needs-based humanitarian assistance

23. As part of its response to the events of the past year, the international humanitarian system also examined itself to improve its working methods and strengthen the effectiveness of the aid it delivers.

A. Filling response and coordination gaps: the cluster approach

24. The cluster approach was developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to help address identified gaps in response and to enhance the quality and coherence of humanitarian action.[4] At the global level, the aim of the cluster approach is to strengthen system-wide preparedness and capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies by ensuring predictable leadership and accountability, common access to stockpiles, trained deployable personnel and response tools. At the country level, its aim is to strengthen humanitarian response in support of national efforts by demanding high standards of predictability, accountability and partnership and by enhancing humanitarian response where country teams deem that gaps exist.

25. At a global level, the cluster approach is being implemented by 11 cluster working groups, each led by an appropriate organization, bringing together United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian actors involved in areas of activity where predictable leadership and capacity in humanitarian emergencies have been lacking, or that require strengthened partnerships with other humanitarian actors.[5] These working groups have launched efforts to pool expertise, agree on common response standards and tools and develop cluster-specific training programmes and emergency rosters. This has led to greater sharing of best practices, enhanced contingency planning and concrete improvements in field response. Most working groups report that their efforts at the global level have led to improved partnerships at the field level, including with national authorities, and have improved the working culture and communication among national, United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian actors.

26. To assist these working groups, a cluster appeal for improving global humanitarian response capacity was launched in March 2006, which requested more than $38 million. Though the appeal received $25 million (65 per cent funding),

[4] The International Committee of the Red Cross is not taking part in the cluster approach. Nevertheless, coordination between the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations will continue to the extent necessary to achieve efficient operational complementarity and a strengthened response for people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence.

[5] Global clusters/sector working groups (and their respective chairs/co-chairs) are agriculture (FAO), camp coordination and management (UNHCR and IOM), early recovery (UNDP), education in emergencies (UNICEF and Save the Children-UK), emergency shelter (UNHCR and IFRC), emergency telecommunications (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs/UNICEF/WFP), health (WHO), logistics (WFP), nutrition (UNICEF), protection of conflict-displaced (UNHCR), protection of non-conflict displaced (UNICEF/OHCHR/UNHCR) water/sanitation/hygiene (UNICEF). Sectors, areas of activity and population categories where leadership and accountability among international humanitarian actors are already clear are not included among the nine clusters at the global level. These include, for example, food, led by WFP; and refugees, led by UNHCR.

most of the funding arrived well into the appeal cycle, impeding the delivery on global cluster objectives. A second, final appeal for building global humanitarian response capacity was launched in April 2007, requesting $63 million from donors for capacity-building in 2007-2008.[6] As these appeals are integral to responding to intergovernmental calls for a more predictable, effective and accountable humanitarian response, support from Member States, including for the current appeal, is critical.

27. At the field level, the cluster approach has been used in more than 10 countries to strengthen humanitarian response in both new and ongoing emergencies. While it is still too early to analyse the full impact of the cluster approach on the ground, initiatives undertaken at the field level have demonstrated early benefits.

Enhanced interface with national and local authorities

28. A key responsibility of cluster leads at the country level is to ensure that humanitarian actors build on local capacities and support national-led structures while developing and maintaining appropriate links with national and local Government authorities. By designating clear focal points within the international humanitarian community for key areas of activity, the cluster approach should help Governments and local authorities know who to approach for support, where required. Where clusters have been implemented, national authorities have recognized their value in bringing more structure, accountability and professionalism to response and in providing a focal point for the authorities on humanitarian programming.

29. For example, the emergency shelter clusters that operated in Indonesia, Lebanon, Pakistan and Somalia improved coordination with and support to national efforts by providing a single interface for national Governments on shelter response. Following the floods and cyclones in Mozambique in early 2007, the cluster approach was used to help prioritize needs for the flash appeal and funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund in support of the resource mobilization initiatives of the Government itself. The early recovery network (the local application of an early recovery cluster) worked closely with the Mozambican national institute for disaster management to lead and coordinate the early recovery process. The work of the camp coordination and camp management clusters in support of operations in Ethiopia, Indonesia, Philippines, Somalia and Uganda has also led to improved engagement with national authorities and reduced potential for gaps in protection and assistance in the camps. National capacity-building efforts have also increased as a result of the cluster approach, for example, in health, camp coordination and camp management.

Greater predictability of roles and responsibilities

30. Another benefit of the cluster approach is greater predictability and accountability in the provision of humanitarian relief. Cluster working groups have

[6] The International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies neither requests nor receives funds from United Nations cluster appeals. IFRC has launched a separate, independent Global Shelter Appeal for $12.3 million to support its role as the shelter cluster convener for natural disaster response. The shelter component of the consolidated Global Appeal for Building Humanitarian Response Capacity has been closely coordinated with IFRC, as UNHCR and IFRC co-chair the Global Shelter Cluster Working Group.

confirmed that clarity of roles and responsibilities among international humanitarian organizations has improved the response to recent emergencies.

31. For example, in Lebanon, partners generally expressed a clearer understanding of the division of responsibilities for logistics, protection and water and sanitation, areas which became critical as a direct result of the fighting. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, investment in water and sanitation grew from $3 million in 2005 to $17 million in 2006, thanks to improved analysis of gaps and clearer articulation of needs by the relevant partners. In northern Uganda, the protection cluster has improved the ability of agencies with a protection mandate to monitor and follow up on protection concerns.

32. The logistics clusters operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Lebanon, Pakistan, the Philippines and Somalia provided more predictable information management services, ocean, air and overland transport and warehousing to all humanitarian actors. The establishment of a liaison presence within the command structure of the Israeli Defense Force helped to facilitate humanitarian convoys into and out of affected areas of Lebanon.

Next steps

33. As the cluster approach continues to be implemented in new and ongoing emergencies, it will require strengthened accountability and expertise, improved working arrangements and streamlined tools that integrate gender, HIV/AIDS and environment into overall response. An external evaluation of the clusters currently under way aims to evaluate cluster performance based on its ultimate aim: delivering more timely, predictable and effective humanitarian response to populations in need.

34. It is also clear that more work is required to inform local, national and regional authorities about the operations and potential benefits of the cluster approach. Some consultations have already taken place. In 2006, the United Nations initiated regional and country workshops for authorities and country teams in Johannesburg, South Africa, and in Ethiopia. As most humanitarian coordinators begin implementing the cluster approach in 2007, such consultations will be expanded. Support from States for these initiatives is welcome.

B. Ensuring the effective use of humanitarian resources

Central Emergency Response Fund

35. From the launch of the Central Emergency Response Fund on 9 March 2006 through the end of 2006, the Emergency relief coordinator committed $259.3 million to 331 urgent lifesaving projects in 35 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. In the first four months of 2007, $157 million was committed to 159 humanitarian projects in 30 countries.[7] Donor support for the Central Emergency Response Fund has also been strong: in 2006, 51 States, one local government and one private organization contributed $298.7 million. In the first four months of 2007, 57 States, one local government and two private organizations pledged more than $345 million, with paid contributions totalling

[7] $74 million for rapid response and $83 million for underfunded emergencies grants.

$267.9 million. This also includes $117,959 in individual contributions through the United Nations Foundation. To date, 71 countries have contributed to the Central Emergency Response Fund.

36. Since its launch, the Central Emergency Response Fund has delivered on many of its objectives. It has provided immediate funding in support of flash appeals for sudden-onset emergencies, supported underfunded, life-saving activities in consolidated appeals and promoted more strategic, inclusive decision-making at the country level. While many of the initial challenges have been addressed, further work is needed to streamline procedures, expand training, harmonize reporting and improve accountability mechanisms. Preparations are also under way for an independent evaluation to review the effectiveness of the Fund at the end of two years, as requested by the General Assembly. The annual report of the Secretary-General on the Central Emergency Response Fund provides additional analysis of the Fund (see A/62/72-E/2007/73).

C. Strengthening coordination: the humanitarian coordinator system

37. Efforts to enhance field-level coordination have focused on strengthening the humanitarian coordinator system, including improved systems for the identification, appointment and training of individuals best qualified to deliver effective and accountable country-level leadership.

38. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has made progress in developing such a candidate pool, taking into consideration gender balance, geographic diversity and broad experience. A standard humanitarian coordinator profile was developed to promote consistency in humanitarian coordinator selection. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has developed a learning and briefing system to support the humanitarian coordinator pool. While two humanitarian coordinator inductions have already taken place, more training is needed, particularly for non-United Nations candidates.

39. Efforts are also under way to promote humanitarian expertise, including disaster preparedness, within the resident coordinator system, through humanitarian training for all incoming resident coordinators. Greater emphasis is also being put on the humanitarian qualifications of prospective resident coordinator candidates for countries that may experience humanitarian emergencies.

D. Broadening humanitarian partnerships

40. Enhancing the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance is as much about improving the system as it is about determining who has the capacity to respond. National and local Governments, the International Organization of Migration, Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies, non-governmental organizations and affected communities are important strategic and operational partners in humanitarian response; their resources and expertise are essential. Governments, the United Nations, other relevant humanitarian organizations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, with full respect for its independence and neutrality, and non-governmental organizations are therefore invited to coordinate their work to benefit people in need.

Strengthening national and local partnerships: improved standby capacities

41. Building national and local preparedness and response capacity is key to a more predictable and effective response. In large-scale natural disasters, national and local response teams are often the most effective at carrying out the initial response. In complex emergencies, national ownership and leadership in the post-conflict phase are critical to the consolidation of peace and to building consensus regarding development priorities. In all humanitarian emergencies, partnering with community members facilitates long-term sustainability.

42. National and local institutions often lack adequate capacity to address emergencies. When the capacity of the humanitarian system is being built, attention should be given to mobilizing and supporting existing capacities, knowledge and institutions through the transfer of technology and expertise and through strengthened partnerships and standby arrangements.

43. United Nations humanitarian agencies are working with Governments to strengthen such capacities. For example, efforts are under way to replicate the International Humanitarian Partnership.[8] The Asia-Pacific humanitarian partnership, comprised of Australia, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand and Singapore, was formed following the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. It was deployed in 2006 to provide logistical support after the earthquake in Yogjakarta, Indonesia and in 2007 in response to the tsunami in the Solomon Islands. Efforts are under way to establish a similar arrangement in Latin America and the Caribbean.

44. United Nations humanitarian organizations are also seeking to improve standby capacities through the clusters, by staffing and training emergency staff and by working with existing Government standby arrangements, such as United Nations Disaster and Coordination, to provide support to country teams for initiating clusters in a sudden-onset emergency. Through the clusters, the United Nations deployed 66 standby partner experts in water, sanitation, health, nutrition, logistics, protection and education and established a network of warehouses (the United Nations Humanitarian response depot network) in Dubai, Ghana, Italy, Malaysia and Panama to make relief assets readily available for deployment. A gender standby capacity has been established to deploy experts to work with clusters on gender equality programming. The global clusters are also working with Governments to encourage contributions to the various directories of the Central register of disaster management capacities, such as the Directory on military and civil defence assets and the Directory of emergency stockpiles. Such directories require broad participation and regular, systematic updates by Governments.

Broadening partnerships beyond the United Nations

Global humanitarian platform

45. Non-governmental organizations are increasingly involved in setting strategy and planning through the clusters, participation in the humanitarian coordinator pool and more broad-based country teams. These efforts have significantly improved collaboration and coherence in the field. However, enhancing the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance will require greater inclusivity on the operational and

[8] The International Humanitarian Partnership, a European standby mechanism that provides rapid operational and logistical support during an emergency, includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

strategic levels. Finding creative ways of ensuring engagement by non-governmental organizations — including Southern and local non-governmental organizations — will be critical to global capacity-building and response preparedness exercises.

46. The global humanitarian platform was established to bring together United Nations humanitarian organizations, non-governmental organizations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the International Organization for Migration and the World Bank to explore ways of broadening humanitarian partnerships. This platform will meet annually for three years to discuss urgent humanitarian issues. On 12 and 13 July 2006, a first meeting brought together 40 leaders of United Nations humanitarian organizations in Geneva, Switzerland.

47. The global humanitarian platform meeting in July 2007 will consider how cooperation and coordination can be strengthened at field level. The agenda will be structured around the five global humanitarian platform principles of partnership: equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. Discussions will focus on best practices and current challenges in various field locations and a range of national and international humanitarian organizations.

Private sector

48. Private companies have continued to emerge as important relief partners. In December 2005, DHL agreed to provide pro bono logistical services to the United Nations to ensure an uninterrupted supply chain at disaster site airports for incoming relief goods. In 2006, DHL deployed logistics teams to Indonesia after the earthquake in Yogyakarta and to the Philippines following typhoon Durian. Ericsson provided telecommunications equipment and services and technical staff for relief operations in Lebanon and Pakistan. TNT, which has been an active partner of the United Nations for four years, provided logistics support for the emergency response during the earthquake in Yogyakarta, the emergency in Lebanon and, more recently, the floods in Mozambique. In 2006, the Vodafone Group Foundation and the United Nations Foundation announced a five-year plan that offers telecommunications technology in support of United Nations emergency response worldwide. As the private sector becomes an increasingly important partner, efforts must be made to adapt the United Nations regulatory environment to facilitate public-private partnerships.

IV. The use of foreign military assets in natural disaster relief[9]

49. The earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean and the earthquake in South Asia were marked by high levels of engagement by foreign military forces in the provision of humanitarian assistance. Thirty-five Member States provided military assets for humanitarian relief to countries affected by the tsunami/earthquake. In response to the earthquake in South Asia, the Pakistan national army delivered the majority of relief, but also requested and received international assistance from foreign militaries. Though the use of military assets in these cases was exceptional and relative to the scale of response, along with other recent experiences they

[9] Although this issue encompasses both foreign and bilateral military and civil defence assets, the scope of the present report allows only for a discussion of the use of foreign military assets.

indicate that military assets continue to be requested, offered and provided in support of relief operations.

50. As defined by the Guidelines on the use of military and civilian defence assets for natural disaster relief (Oslo Guidelines),[10] military assets comprise relief personnel, equipment, supplies and services provided by foreign military organizations for international disaster relief assistance. Foreign military assets are frequently provided on a bilateral basis in response to natural disasters. In limited cases, and often in response to large-scale disasters, foreign military assets have been provided on a multilateral basis through the United Nations.

51. The use of military assets has often been useful in addressing gaps in the civilian response capacity. However, at other times, such assets have been supply-driven, rather than based on assessed needs, have not been well coordinated and have had a negative impact on aid budgets. Many Governments that provide military assets for disaster response have established policies on their use. International standards and guidelines also specify the appropriate use of military assets, based on international law and existing norms, including humanitarian principles. The Oslo Guidelines and the International Federation of the Red Cross addendum to the Oslo Guidelines are two such guidelines developed in consultation with, and endorsed by, Member States. However, compliance with them remains uneven. Enhanced dissemination, promotion and adherence to these guidelines require more attention and resources from the international community.

A. Appropriate use

52. The use of military assets must be provided based on the request, consent or concurrence of the affected Government and should be appropriate to the size, scale and specific requirements of the emergency. While envisaged as a means of last resort, their use may sometimes be the only available option. This requires that the affected Government, in coordination with all humanitarian actors working on the ground, rapidly and effectively communicate the size, scale and nature of needs. It also requires that Governments providing military assets do so based on identified needs, aim to coordinate with national and international actors and phase out their use once civilian alternatives are available.

53. The United Nations continues to work with providing and receiving Governments to familiarize them with the tenets of disaster response through established United Nations civil-military training courses, support for military exercises and the promotion of existing guidelines. As part of preparedness activities, Member States should review and consider integrating the Oslo Guidelines for the deployment, receipt and use of foreign military assets into their national disaster preparedness plans, military doctrine and national policies.

[10] The Guidelines on the use of military and civilian defense assets in disaster relief (Oslo Guidelines) were first published in May 1994. More than 45 States and 25 organizations participated in drafting the Guidelines. In November 2006, the Guidelines were re-launched, having undergone a revision to reflect current terminology and organizational changes.

B. Coordination

54. Requirements regarding coordinating the use of foreign military assets vary from disaster to disaster. Past experience has demonstrated that when foreign military assets are provided in support of the overall international response effort, coordination of such assets makes them much more effective. In the 2000 Mozambique flood response, 47 helicopters were sent from 12 nations to respond to humanitarian needs. These assets were centrally tasked in a joint operations centre, where the Government of the affected country, the United Nations and the providing Governments ensured effective coordination and employment of these assets.

55. Such situations demonstrate that even bilateral support arrangements require the strengthening of multilateral coordination structures and the encouragement of bilateral providers to contribute to and support them. During the response in 2004/2005 to the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia, the lack of a centralized coordination mechanism meant that bilateral deployments of foreign military assets created bottlenecks, delays and duplication in the distribution of urgent relief supplies. While deployed foreign military assets are clearly owned and operated by providing Governments, Governments are encouraged to coordinate these assets within the established structures of the civilian national and local disaster authorities, together with the United Nations, as appropriate.

C. Cost

56. While in many sudden-onset disaster responses, the use of military assets has proven indispensable to the delivery of life-saving assistance, it often incurs significant expense. Cost-effectiveness, however, cannot be viewed in terms of financial expenditure alone, but must also be viewed in the light of the demands and needs arising from each emergency and the imperative of saving lives quickly. While the United Nations welcomes Government efforts to make such assets available in support of humanitarian operations, such contributions should be provided in addition to funds earmarked for humanitarian relief assistance, as stipulated in the Oslo Guidelines.[11] Governments are also encouraged to provide leaner deployment packages that correspond to identified needs.

57. Moreover, in some cases, the costs of employing military assets for disaster relief are billed directly or indirectly to humanitarian/development aid budgets. This practice tends to deplete aid funds that could otherwise be spent on food, medicine and shelter and thereby puts the military in direct competition with aid agencies.

58. In recent years, Member States, through Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, have recognized the important role military assets have played and can play in supporting an effective disaster response. Consequently, intergovernmental resolutions have referred to the need for more systematic linkages with providers of military assets to identify their availability and promote coordination of these assets for international disaster response.

[11] "An assisting State deciding to employ its military and civilian defense assets should bear in mind the cost benefit ratio of such operations as compared to other alternatives, if available. In principle, the costs involved in using military and civilian defense assets on disaster relief missions abroad should be covered by funds other than those available for international development activities."

59. More intergovernmental discussion is needed to determine how States can help promote internationally established guidelines and best practices in these areas. However, such discussions need to be informed by better analysis of the cost, impact and effectiveness of such assets and by recommendations for actions to be taken between disasters to improve the predictability of the use of military assets in disaster relief.

V. Needs-based humanitarian financing, including Central Emergency Response Fund

60. The scale and magnitude of humanitarian emergencies have put pressure on the international community to make more efficient use of humanitarian funding, prompting the development of new mechanisms to improve, on a global basis, the timeliness, predictability and impartial use of funds during emergencies.

A. Consolidated and flash appeals

61. The annual Consolidated Appeals Process and accompanying common humanitarian action plans are the United Nations humanitarian system's primary planning and fund-raising tools for humanitarian response; flash appeals set strategic priorities and actions during sudden-onset emergencies. Since they were first established in 1992, 240 consolidated and flash appeals have been issued for both complex emergencies and natural disasters and have raised $29 billion. More than 100 organizations list projects in consolidated and flash appeals each year, including the United Nations, the International Organization for Migration and non-governmental organizations. The International Federation of the Red Cross issues separate independent appeals for ongoing and sudden-onset emergencies, which are occasionally annexed to a Consolidated Appeals Process or flash appeal.

62. As humanitarian funding remains insufficient (on average, only 67 per cent of funds requested by the Consolidated Appeals Process are actually provided) and uneven across emergencies, the Consolidated Appeals Process is necessary to match funding and needs reliably. Its continued success, however, requires improvements to its strategy-setting and needs analysis and broader participation, including from non-governmental organizations, civil society groups and beneficiaries. Closer engagement by donors and better vetting of the projects that meet Consolidated Appeals Process funding requirements will be pivotal in convincing parliaments to increase humanitarian appropriations and multilateral support.

B. Pooled funding mechanisms

Central Emergency Response Fund

63. The Central Emergency Response Fund is a standby funding mechanism whose grant element was established by the General Assembly in 2005 to enable more timely and reliable humanitarian assistance to those affected by humanitarian emergencies (General Assembly resolution 60/124). Though it is too early to analyze the impact of the Central Emergency Response Fund on overall funding levels, early indications suggest that Central Emergency Response Fund allocations

were able to provide funds ahead of donor contributions to appeals and that they raised Consolidated Appeals Process funding levels by three per cent and flash appeals by 10 per cent during the first month.

64. Work to enhance inter-agency collaboration continues, including work with non-governmental organizations, as does work to expand the donor base, improve funding impartiality and support coordination under the leadership of resident and humanitarian coordinators. The effectiveness of the Central Emergency Response Fund will also depend on its ability to complement other humanitarian funding tools and support a broader range of operational partners.

65. The implementation of the Central Emergency Response Fund has further highlighted the need for improved definitions, indicators and needs assessment and analysis frameworks to better identify priorities and differentiate needs as situations evolve. Common information standards, definitions and criteria should be established, data should be disaggregated by sex and age, and the views of beneficiaries should be integrated into needs analysis. Shared platforms for information management and analysis should be developed. A better evidence base for decision-making is critical to planning, to the improved use of humanitarian funds and to the measurement of outcomes. Such issues need to be monitored and analyzed, including as part of the external two-year Central Emergency Response Fund review.

Common humanitarian funds

66. Common humanitarian funds were initiated by a small group of donors to give the humanitarian coordinator increased access to and authority over predictable, flexible funds to be disbursed based on needs and priority. Unlike the earmarked funding model, in which donors select projects from consolidated or flash appeals, overall authority for the use of common humanitarian funds lies with the humanitarian coordination and allocation decisions are made exclusively at the country level, based on the established priorities of the country team. In this way, common humanitarian funds allow humanitarian coordinators and country teams to make fund allocations more impartial. Such funds have been employed in the Sudan since January 2006 ($143 million) and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since March 2006 ($92 million) to support activities planned in the broader appeals.

67. Early analysis indicates that these two funds have contributed to small increases of one to two per cent in overall funding levels, and have improved prioritization by encouraging field-driven decision-making. Yet the effectiveness of these funds requires better country-level management systems, reduced administrative and transaction costs and faster disbursements, particularly to non-governmental organizations. Common humanitarian funds also require that donors front-load their contributions to ensure both greater predictability for recipients and more flexibility for the humanitarian coordinator and to simplify their reporting requirements in order to speed up allocations.

Emergency response funds

68. Like common humanitarian funds, emergency response funds are country-level pooled funding mechanisms that offer small grants to humanitarian assistance actors on the ground. Since 1997, the six emergency response funds in Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Liberia and Somalia have disbursed

$65.78 million and financed 538 projects for a wide range of activities. Efforts are under way to establish additional emergency response funds in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and southern Sudan.

69. Emergency response funds allocations are smaller than those of other funding mechanisms (ranging from $100,000 to $250,000), are managed at the country level by inter-agency review boards and often target small initiatives implemented by civil society organizations. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, emergency response funds allocations were used to repair a bridge, allowing the effective delivery of relief supplies to 150,000 internally displaced persons. While the size, structure and local focus of emergency response funds allocations do little to correct global funding imbalances, emergency response funds are able to fill unforeseen response gaps and allow non-United Nations partners to scale up their operations quickly. Furthermore, they work in tandem with the Central Emergency Response Fund when funding needs exceed their capacity. Emergency response funds have also been effective at directing funds towards strengthening national and local response capacity.

C. Agency emergency funds

70. Some operational humanitarian agencies maintain their own emergency funds.[12] These funds have contributed to the efficiency of response by allowing agencies such as the World Food Programme to respond to an emergency in a timely fashion by means of food procurement and other actions; allowing UNHCR to respond quickly to sudden influxes of refugees and other displaced populations; and allowing UNICEF to respond to sudden emergencies in places where there are no humanitarian coordinators or consolidated appeals. While such funds each cover the areas of response of individual agencies, they may be disbursed faster than pooled funds because they are managed internally. They should therefore be supported as key components of available humanitarian funding mechanisms.

D. Challenges

Complementarity among humanitarian funding mechanisms

71. The success of these initiatives depends on coordination, complementarity and strategic planning to maximize assistance activities and discourage competition. This is particularly important to common humanitarian funds and emergency response funds, which largely operate under the authority of the humanitarian coordinator, and to the Central Emergency Response Fund, which is managed by humanitarian coordinators under the overall authority of the emergency relief coordinator. Humanitarian coordinators have an important role to play in applying these funding tools and ensuring complementarity among them. However, more guidance on the comparative strengths of these funds is needed.

[12] These include the FAO Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities, the UNDP Thematic Trust Fund for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, the UNFPA Emergency Fund, the UNHCR Operational Reserve, the UNICEF Emergency Programme Fund, the WFP Immediate Response Account, the World Health Organization Rapid Response Funds and the IFRC Disaster Response Emergency Fund.

Needs-driven assistance and the quality of data and analysis

72. The effective use of humanitarian funding mechanisms depends on the development of an accurate picture of the needs of beneficiaries, of common performance measures and quality analysis of funding levels and trends. Current efforts to generate consistent and comparable needs assessments will help generate more value for each dollar spent. Moreover, there is still room for improvement in donor and agency reporting of the sources and use of funds to the financial tracking service, a key prerequisite for effective resource allocation.

Streamlining management practices and administrative actions

73. While the increased use of pooled funds has helped to lighten the administrative burdens of donors, it has shifted the burden to the United Nations fund managers and to the offices of the humanitarian coordinators. The use and decision-making practices of all humanitarian funding mechanisms must be harmonized to avoid undue administrative burdens on the organizations that administer them. Likewise, donor reporting requirements should be standardized and simplified for those recipient agencies and organizations who must report on the use of funds.

Participation of non-United Nations actors

74. Non-governmental organizations frequently suffer from the lack of liquidity available to them at the initial stages of new emergencies. While consolidated and flash appeals increasingly include non-governmental organizations projects, the Central Emergency Response Fund is currently unable to allocate funds directly to non-governmental organizations. Common humanitarian funds, although allowed to fund non-governmental organizations directly, still show a preference for funding United Nations and other eligible agencies, while emergency response fund allocations are often too small and targeted to have an impact on programming. As non-governmental organizations are key partners in humanitarian response, consideration should be given to how best to support them through timely access to existing funding mechanisms, while holding them to the standards such support will require.

Timeliness and additionality

75. For all humanitarian mechanisms to function optimally, they must be equally supported by donors. While there is no evidence to suggest that the emergence of new funding mechanisms has increased or detracted from humanitarian funding overall, consistent commitment to these funds must be monitored and tracked.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

76. The activities and challenges identified above suggest that an increase in the demand for humanitarian activities is likely. The incidence and severity of disasters associated with natural hazards may increase due to climate change and vulnerability linked to population growth, urbanization, desertification and environmental degradation. Weak governance, armed conflict, political, religious and ethnic tensions, competition over scarce natural resources and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other pandemics may further compound their impact.

77. As the demands on the humanitarian system grow, United Nations humanitarian agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, International Organization for Migration and non-governmental organization partners may find it increasingly difficult to respond adequately. Establishing partnerships, creating capacities within national and local governments, regional organizations and civil society groups and better defining needs are critical investments in addressing humanitarian vulnerability more effectively in the coming years, and in doing so impartially.

78. It is thus of paramount importance to ensure that humanitarian agencies and their partners are given the space, access and security to provide life-saving assistance to those in need. It is also essential to promote respect for humanitarian principles and a better understanding of the role of humanitarian workers in support of Governments and their populations.

79. Based on the above, Member States may wish to consider the following:

(a) Governments are urged to recognize that access to vulnerable people and the security of humanitarian staff are prerequisites to any effective humanitarian response. Governments are also urged to initiate and, where agreed with humanitarian actors, fully implement, concrete measures to facilitate the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel and the delivery of humanitarian supplies and equipment. The United Nations stands ready to assist in this regard;

(b) United Nations humanitarian agencies should strengthen their engagement and capacity-building efforts with regional organizations to help bolster humanitarian responses in support of the efforts of national Governments and regional organizations;

(c) When regional concerns are at stake, Member States are encouraged to recognize and support regional responses, including in intergovernmental forums;

(d) Member States are urged to prepare and update disaster preparedness plans at all levels and promote regular disaster preparedness exercises in accordance with priority five of the 2005 Hyogo framework for action;

(e) Member States are invited to work with the United Nations to strengthen humanitarian standby arrangements, including by participating in humanitarian response networks, by maintaining standby directories of the central register of disaster management capacities and by facilitating standby arrangements with the private sector;

(f) The United Nations is encouraged to review, in consultation with Member States, the use of military assets for disaster relief, with the aim of improving the predictability and use of these assets, based on humanitarian principles;

(g) Member States should consider integrating the guidelines on the use of military and civilian defence assets for natural disaster relief into national preparedness plans;

(h) United Nations humanitarian agencies and organizations should improve the accuracy of data on beneficiaries, needs and performance by agreeing on commonly accepted definitions, indicators and methodologies for data collection and needs assessments and standards for information management systems;

(i) Member States, relevant United Nations humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations should provide timely and accurate information on contributions and uses of humanitarian funds through the financial tracking service;

(j) Member States contributing to pooled funds are encouraged to work with the United Nations to improve the complementarity and management of these funds, including by harmonizing donor policies and reporting practices;

(k) Member States are invited to make and increase multi-year contributions to the Central Emergency Response Fund, so that it may reach its $500 million target by 2008;

(l) Member States are also invited to make and increase flexible, multi-year contributions to all other pooled funds and humanitarian funding mechanisms, including consolidated and flash appeals and the emergency funds of various agencies.